



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Response to the Estyn thematic review on best practice in the creative arts at Key Stages 3 and 4

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

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Report title:**Best practice in the creative arts at Key Stages 3 and 4****Report details**

The report was commissioned by the Education Directorate and is set in the context of the Welsh Government's commitment to a five-year Creative Learning Plan to improve attainment through creativity, increase and improve arts experiences in schools, and support practitioners to develop their skills.

This report is published in response to a request in the annual remit to Estyn from the Welsh Government for 2014-15. The report examines best practice in teaching and learning in the creative arts at key stages 3 and 4.

Context: The findings and recommendations in this report draw on visits to 30 secondary schools, which were identified as having strong practice in the creative arts as a result of Estyn inspections or through an analysis of key stage 3 and GCSE data.

Main findings**Outcomes in the creative arts in the most effective schools****Art and design**

- In art and design at key stage 3, many pupils explore a good range of two-dimensional processes. They practice their skills independently to achieve effective results in paint, pastels and pencils and, in a minority of schools, in printmaking. However, even where there is good practice, pupils do not explore a wide enough range of three-dimensional media and only a minority use information and communication technology (ICT) software to create digital images.
- Many pupils at key stage 3 gain a good understanding of why artists work as they do, and the intentions behind their work. They use their analysis of the work of other artists imaginatively to improve their own work.
- At key stage 4, most pupils gain increasing mastery of techniques and processes so that they are able to communicate their ideas effectively. Their sketchbooks are personal and lively explorations of ideas and processes. Through investigation and experimentation, most pupils' work becomes increasingly more original. They improve their drawing skills through responding imaginatively to innovative drawing tasks and by exploring techniques independently. Most pupils refine their ideas by researching thoroughly, and integrate their studies of the

work of other artists in imaginative ways that show a high level of understanding.

Drama

- At key stage 3, nearly all pupils show a good understanding of ideas in performing and the conventions of a variety of dramatic forms. Most pupils collaborate effectively to devise simple pieces, improvised performances and tableaux. They structure their performances to express a broad range of concepts. Most pupils investigate the use of movement, gesture, facial expression, eye contact and voice with enthusiasm and increasing skill to develop characters. They work well, individually and in groups to refine their skills. A majority of pupils develop their vocal and physical skills effectively. Most pupils practise and perform scripted pieces of drama with commitment. However, a minority of pupils in Welsh-medium schools use English too frequently to discuss their ideas when working in groups.
- By the end of key stage 3, many pupils also demonstrate a good understanding of the skills of directors and technicians, and a minority experiment imaginatively with sound, voice and lighting to create atmosphere.
- At key stage 4, many pupils identify important stylistic features in the work of set practitioners. Most pupils use their bodies and voices creatively and with control, and explore abstract movement and proxemics to create devised pieces that communicate ideas effectively. Those pupils working with the technical aspects of theatre develop their skills well. They work closely with their peers following the acting route to enhance their performances.

Music

- At key stage 3, many pupils make strong progress from their individual starting points, although pupils arrive in Year 7 with a range of experiences that are broader in music than they are in art and design or drama. Most pupils develop their performance skills well by mastering an increasingly demanding repertoire. With practice, most pupils sing and play competently in parts. Most pupils explore the musical elements, analyse a range of musical styles and employ music technology effectively to compose short pieces.

- At key stage 4, a majority of pupils perform with expression and precision. They demonstrate a sound grasp of the conventions of a wide variety of musical styles. They are self-disciplined and well-motivated to rehearse, both independently to ensure technical mastery, and collaboratively to develop a sense of ensemble and performance. Many pupils appraise critically a variety of increasing complex musical forms and styles. They listen intelligently to compare and contrast different performances of the same piece, using well-reasoned responses. However, in a few schools where pupils achieve well, pupils' literacy skills let them down in appraisal activities.
- Many pupils at key stage 4 compose pieces with a high degree of originality that draw on their own strengths as performers. In many successful schools, pupils use technology very effectively to devise compositions.

The contribution of effective teaching and learning in the creative arts to pupils' wellbeing

- Pupils improve their wellbeing through well-structured experiences in the arts. The arts help pupils to increase their confidence and self-esteem, improve their social skills and develop their understanding of the views of others. Through learning in the arts, many pupils gain important life skills of independent learning, planning, and problem-solving.
- Many pupils value the opportunities that the creative arts give them to express their own ideas. Pupils find that practice in presenting their personal responses gives them greater confidence in other areas of school life and work. Furthermore, pupils say that celebrating their arts skills in public through exhibition and performance has had a significantly positive impact on how they view themselves and their future.

Standards in the creative arts across Wales

- At key stage 3, across Wales, most pupils achieve the expected level 5 or above in art and design and in music. Pupils' achievement in the arts is a little higher than in the core subjects of English, Welsh or mathematics.

- At key stage 4, art and design is the most popular of the arts subjects, with around 25% of pupils entering GCSE. Each year around 9% of pupils take GCSE drama. Music is the least popular of the arts subjects at GCSE, with around 8% of pupils taking this option. In those schools where provision is of a high quality, take up is often higher than these averages.
- Many pupils in Wales who opt for art and design, music or drama at GCSE achieve an A*-C grade. Pupils' achievement in music is better than in art and design and in drama. Pupils' achievement in the arts subjects at key stage 4 is much higher than their achievement in English and mathematics and slightly higher than their performance in Welsh.
- In a very few schools, pupils achieve well in all three arts subjects at keys stage 4. It is more usual that pupils' outcomes are higher in one of the arts subjects. This is because the success of these departments is the result of strong subject leadership and consistently good teaching. In addition, there is little correlation between schools where pupils perform well in the arts and those in which pupils perform highly in the core subjects.
- At key stage 4, girls' performance is better than that of boys in all of the arts subjects. Of the three subjects, a higher proportion of boys opt for music and their achievement is better than boys' achievement in art and design or in drama.
- Pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) perform better in the arts than in many other subject areas. Of the three arts subjects, a greater proportion of eFSM pupils choose to take GCSE art and design than opt for GCSE drama or music, and their achievement is better. The gap in performance between eFSM pupils and non-eFSM pupils is smaller in art and design than it is in drama or music, and much smaller for each than the gap in English, in Welsh first language, and in mathematics.

Learning experiences in the creative arts in the most effective schools

- In the most effective departments, pupils develop their knowledge skills and understanding very well at key stage 3, which provides them with a solid foundation for success at key stage 4. These good practice departments also make valuable links to their feeder primary schools, which help to bridge the transition in learning between key stage 2 and

3.

- In many good arts departments, effective provision is made for more able and talented pupils that helps them to make the most of their abilities. The most effective provision is through extra-curricular work linked to arts agencies and practitioners. However, in lessons, a minority of teachers do not extend the progress of more able pupils well enough.
- In schools where there is good practice in the arts, teachers plan well to develop pupils' literacy. This has a positive impact on pupils' standards, especially in writing and in oracy. However, many departments do not pay good enough attention to the development of pupils' numeracy skills.
- Many good arts departments plan very well to develop pupils' digital skills. However, even where there is good practice, in a minority of schools, in art and design and in drama there are not enough opportunities for pupils to produce creative work using digital media.
- In schools where pupils achieve well in the creative arts, there is a wide range of art-related extra-curricular activities that are of particular benefit to disadvantaged pupils who may not have the home benefits of their more advantaged peers. Many schools provide opportunities for pupils to use specialist spaces and equipment outside lessons, for example.
- In nearly all schools where pupils achieve well in the arts, teachers have excellent subject knowledge, and many are active practitioners and participants in the arts. They use their expertise to explain and model techniques proficiently, and maintain a serious approach to the rigour and discipline essential to good outcomes in the arts.
- In most schools where pupils achieve well in the creative arts, teachers focus successfully on developing pupils' critical thinking skills. This helps pupils to develop the skills needed to evaluate their own work and to make good progress. They plan well for pupils to study the work of creative practitioners, and to experience creative work at first hand.

Leadership and the creative arts in the most effective schools

- In all the schools where pupils achieve well in the creative arts, senior leaders give high status to the arts. They recognise the importance that the arts play in developing a strong ethos in the school, and their value in promoting a stimulating, creative learning environment for all pupils.

- In these schools, senior leaders support their departments to enable pupils of all abilities, including those pupils who are at risk of disengagement, to achieve to the best of their abilities. However, even in a few of the good practice schools, the Pupil Deprivation Grant is not used well enough to support pupils eligible for free school meals to achieve more highly in the arts.
- Senior leaders in these good practice schools recognise their arts departments are often a source of excellent practice in developing pupils' creativity and thinking skills. A few senior leaders share these teaching approaches successfully across the school to improve practice and outcomes. Only in a few schools are senior leaders beginning to investigate in a structured way the development of creative learning across the school as a response to Successful Futures (Donaldson 2015).
- All the good practice schools benefit from strong subject leadership in the arts. These middle leaders are often good and excellent teachers, with a high level of expertise in their subjects. They lead their teams well, and have a dynamic approach to developing their subject.
- Most subject leaders analyse the work of their departments well. However, in a few schools, departmental evaluations do not focus sufficiently well on the outcomes of groups of pupils, or on the strengths and weaknesses of teaching in the department. As a result, departmental action plans in a few departments are not sharp enough to identify specific areas for improvement.
- Subject leaders in many schools where there is good practice in the arts develop their practice through working as examination board moderators, and many teachers in the arts benefit from the subject training days offered by the examination boards. Otherwise, there are not enough structured opportunities for professional learning specifically for teachers in the arts.

Estyn's recommendations are directed at schools, local authorities and regional consortia. They target improvements needed to improve provision and to raise standards in the creative arts.

Responses to the recommendations are outlined below.

Recommendations 1–8

Schools should:

R1 Learn from the best practice described in this report

R2 Make sure that there are enough opportunities in lessons for more able pupils to extend their learning

R3 Maximise opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills, when appropriate, in arts lessons

R4 Make sure that arts departments make the best use of opportunities to create art works that develop pupils' digital competences

R5 Evaluate closely pupil performance, and the strengths and areas for development in teaching in the arts to inform departmental planning

R6 Analyse the contribution that arts departments make to pupils' skills, and develop strategies for creative learning across the school

R7 Make better use of their grant funding to support disadvantaged pupils in the creative arts

R8 Develop provision and practice in the arts to take account of the recommendations of Successful Futures

Welsh Government response:

In March 2015, the Welsh Government in partnership with the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) published *Creative learning through the arts – an action plan for Wales*, a 5-year commitment to improve attainment through creativity, increase and improve arts experiences in schools, and support teachers and arts practitioners in developing their skills. The actions of this plan include grant support to help schools to embed creativity into their teaching and learning.

Activities within the plan are divided into 2 main strands: a Lead Creative Schools Programme and All-Wales Arts and Education Programme. Both strands support the education priorities to improve literacy, numeracy and narrowing the gap in attainment for disadvantaged pupils through creativity and embedding creative practice within teaching and learning across the whole curriculum.

The Lead Creative Schools Scheme, open to all schools in Wales, is an intensive intervention programme that draws on the skills of creative practitioners and teachers working together to improve the outcomes for learners. The projects of participating schools in round 1 addressed a range of school development priorities using a range of arts and creative methods, including use of digital media. It is anticipated that a third of schools in Wales will be able to benefit from this programme during the lifetime of the programme.

Schools also have access to an All-Wales Arts and Education Programme delivered by 4 regional networks. These networks have been remitted to build bridges between schools and arts and cultural organisations, share best practice and provide professional development opportunities.

It is anticipated that the creative teaching and learning alongside increased and improved arts activity will tackle lack of aspiration and low levels of engagement and achievement amongst disadvantaged learners.

Through our National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF), schools are able to access exemplification materials to support the delivery of numeracy activities across the curriculum. The Literacy and Numeracy strategic action plan sets out our actions to improve learners' literacy and numeracy across the curriculum including within creative arts.

A Digital Competence Framework will be made available from September 2016. This will be embedded as a cross curricular theme as the new curriculum for Wales is developed.

The Digital Competency Framework is structured around 4 main "Strands". One of these is "Producing" and includes creative elements such as text, graphics, audio and video and combinations of these.

The Welsh Government will publicise Estyn's report on Best practice in the creative arts at key stages 3 and 4 through Dysg.

Recommendation 9–12

Local authorities and the regional consortia should:

R9 Provide more support for schools to develop effective self-evaluation and planning for improvement in the arts

R10 Offer professional learning experiences for teachers and subject leaders in the arts

R11 Support schools in the effective use of grant funding to support disadvantaged pupils and to work with arts agencies and arts practitioners

R12 Help schools to review their curriculum development and design towards meeting the recommendations of Successful Futures

Welsh Government response:

The vision and ambition set out in Successful Futures to build a new curriculum for Wales is dependent on partnership working between stakeholders. Local authorities with their regional consortia are expected to support schools and encourage debate, discussion and collaboration between them on how to strengthen practice and embed the four purposes.

The Welsh Government's Creative Learning Plan will support local authorities and regional education consortia in responding to these recommendations through the opportunities to collaborate with arts practitioners.

The simplified school improvement grant arrangements, which have resulted in the creation of the Education Improvement Grant for Schools, gives local authorities and consortia more flexibility to target resources at areas of greatest need, to best address local, regional and national priorities, and to deliver better outcomes for all learners.

A memorandum of understanding was signed last year between the Arts Council of Wales and the Regional Education Consortium partners regarding hosting regional co-ordinators to deliver the objectives and project activity set out in the Arts and Creative Learning Plan. To date the regional education consortia and appointed officers have had a key role in ensuring that the Creative Learning Plan is communicated and embedded in Regional Education Consortia areas in Wales and take up of the grant funding that is available to schools.

The Regional Arts and Education Networks have now been established and will work closely with the regional education consortia, challenge advisers and co-ordinators responsible for the Lead Creative Schools Scheme. Their remit includes providing a brokerage service between the arts and education sectors, professional development for teachers, artists, arts and cultural organisations and opportunities for teachers and artists to develop and share their knowledge and skills.

A range of professional learning experiences for teachers and subject leaders to support the implementation of the new curriculum will be developed through the leading work of the New Deal Pioneer schools.

The New Deal pioneer schools are already working closely in aligning with Curriculum and Digital Competence Pioneers to ensure that all practitioners are supported to realise this ambitious and exciting future.

Publication details

The report will be published on or after **19th July 2016** and may be accessed on Estyn's website www.estyn.gov.uk